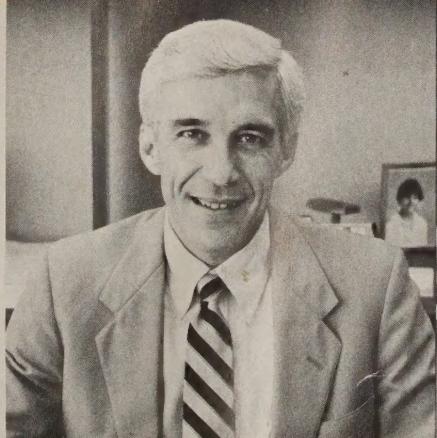
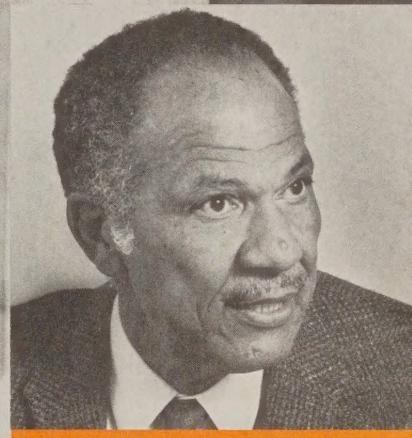
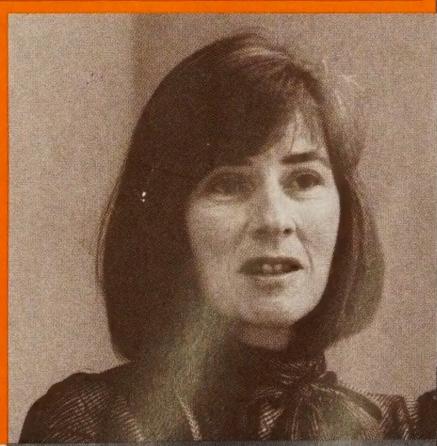
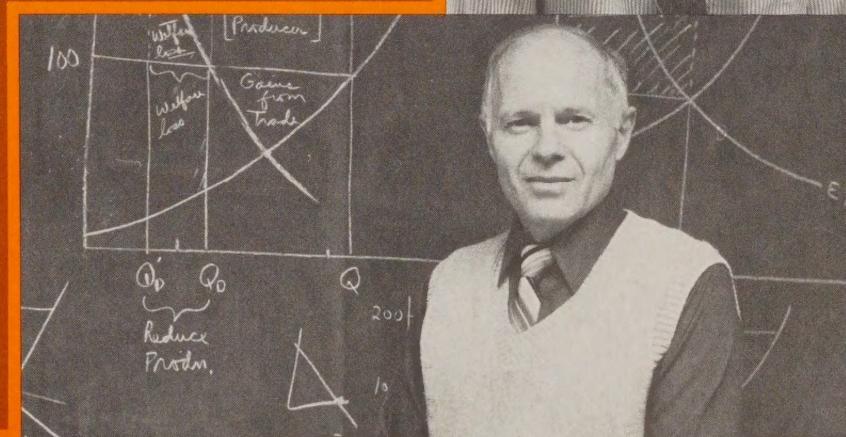
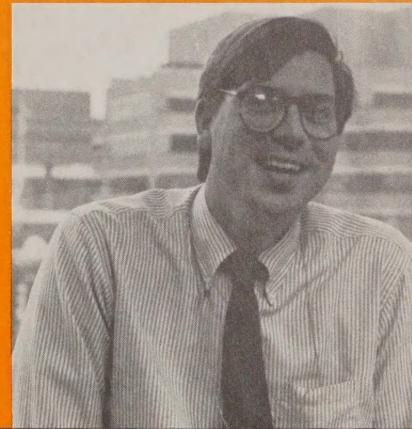


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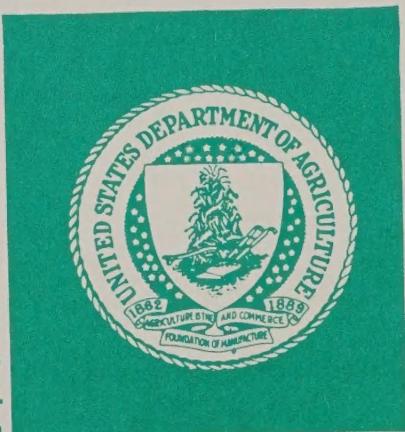
# Working in ERS



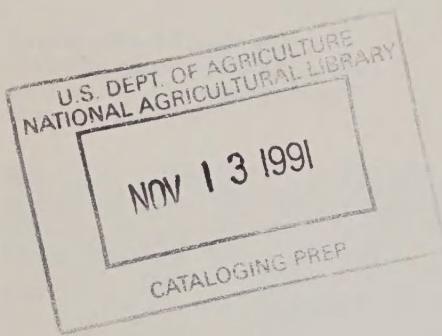
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# Working in ERS

## A Guide for Present and Prospective Employees of the Economic Research Service

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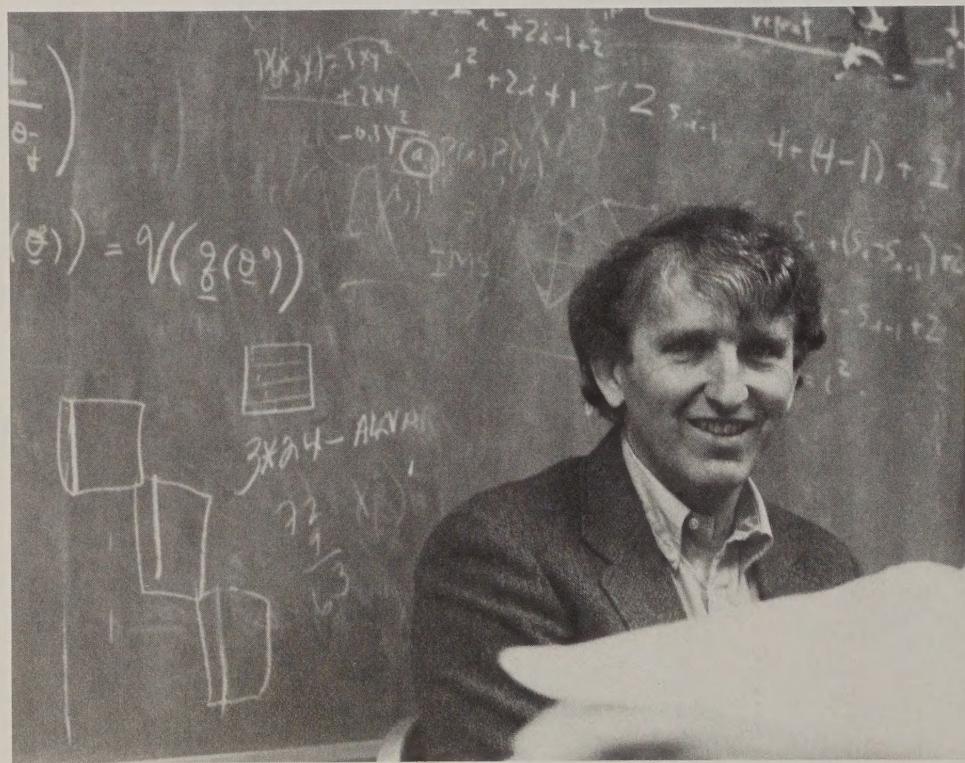
**Suchada Langley, top left, Agriculture Policy Research Section leader, Agriculture and Trade Analysis Division.**



**Robert Bohall, center left, Livestock, Dairy, and Poultry Branch chief, Commodity Economics Division.**



**Sara Mazie, left, editor of Rural Development Perspectives (RDP), and Gregory R. Gajewski, a member of the RDP editorial board.**



**Charles Hallahan, above, Agency Systems Branch chief, Data Services Center.**



**James Schaub, right, Oil Crops Analysis Section leader, Commodity Economics Division.**



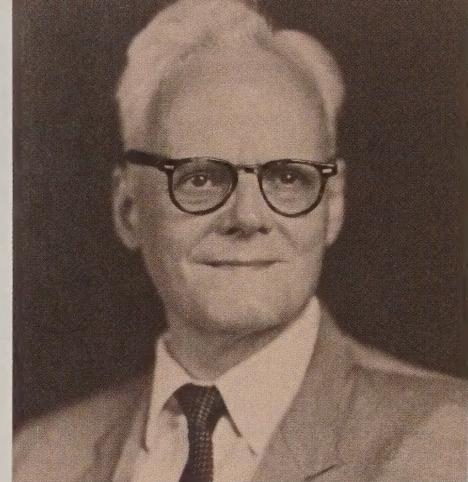
### **The ERS Mission: Information for Decisionmakers**

**F**acts, analyses, projections, data -- products of the modern information age -- have become valuable commodities and are vital resources to the decision-making process. These are the products of the Economic Research Service. ERS generates timely, concise, and accurate economic and social information and analysis that agricultural decisionmakers use to measure and improve the performance of agriculture and rural America.

ERS employees are dedicated to a high standard of quality and integrity in their research products:

- Analyses of market conditions and forecasts of major agricultural economic trends.
- Research and analysis of policy alternatives.
- Responses to information requests.
- Databases.

ERS has a large and varied clientele: farmers, private analysts, processors and marketers of agricultural commodities, rural leaders, input suppliers, consumers, and extension workers as well as officials in the Executive Branch, Congress, and State and local governments.



*Frederick Waugh, a distinguished agricultural economist in the profession's early years, served as a division director in ERS.*

## ERS Has a Proud Past, a Promising Future

ERS is little more than a quarter century old. But its firm foundation of information gathering and public service dates back nearly 150 years to the first collection of agricultural statistics mandated by Congress. Its predecessor, the Bureau of Agricultural Economics (BAE), was the cradle of modern agricultural economics. Agricultural economists like Ezekiel, Working, Black, Waugh, Fox, Nerlove, and Griliches and rural sociologists like Galpin, Taylor, Taeuber, Loomis, Likert, and Hagood created a rich legacy of research greatly advancing knowledge of agriculture and rural society.

The tradition continues. Professional associations, the Federal Government, and other public and private groups have frequently honored ERS researchers and their products.



*ERS administrator John Lee, left, presents an Excellence Award to Kuo Huang for his research in developing a model to estimate complete demand systems for food commodities. Huang also received recognition for his research from the American Agricultural Economics Association and the Southern Agricultural Economics Association.*

## 150 Years of Service

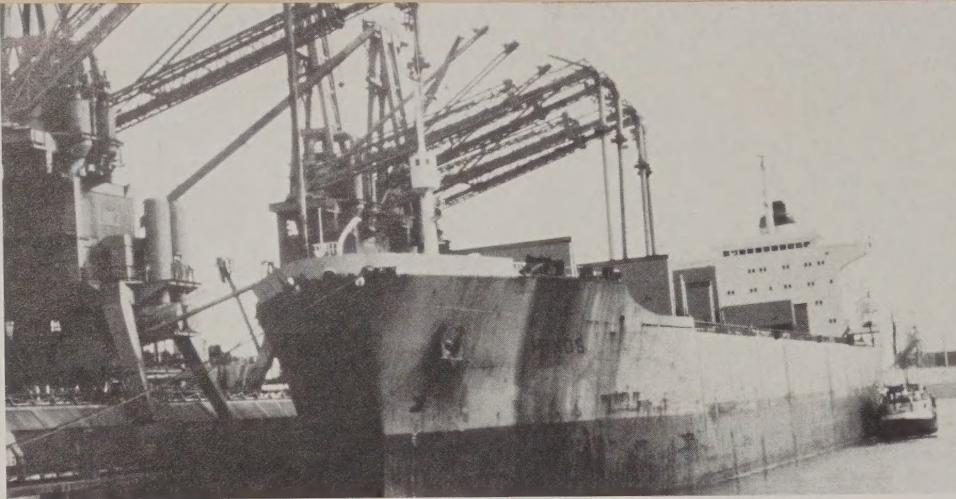
- 1839--Congress provided \$1,000 to collect agricultural statistics.
- 1862--Department of Agriculture established.
- 1866--Monthly reports on crop conditions began.
- 1905--Office of Farm Management established.
- 1913--Office of Markets and Rural Organization Service established.
- 1922--Bureau of Agricultural Economics established.
- 1923--First Agricultural Outlook Conference.
- 1926--Cooperative Marketing Act.
- 1929--Division of Cooperative Marketing transferred to the Federal Farm Board.
- 1938--BAE made program planning and economic research agency.
- 1945--Planning functions transferred to Office of the Secretary.
- 1946--Agricultural Marketing Act.
- 1953--BAE abolished. Functions transferred to Agricultural Research Service and Agricultural Marketing Service.
- 1961--Economic Research Service and Statistical Reporting Service established.
- 1978--Economics, Statistics, and Cooperatives Service established.
- 1980--Economics and Statistics Service and Agricultural Cooperative Service established.
- 1981--Economic Research Service and Statistical Reporting Service reestablished.

Agricultural economics research and analysis have been performed in the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) for most of this century. The Secretary of Agriculture in 1922 charged the new Bureau of Agricultural Economics to investigate every important economic and institutional condition that influenced farm production or prices. Such investigations provided farmers and farm product marketers with the facts to make wise production and marketing decisions. The new bureau was also responsible for some regulatory functions and collecting and reporting statistics.

In 1923, BAE sponsored the first of a series of annual outlook conferences that continue to this day. The bureau was reorganized in 1938 to spearhead general planning for USDA, a controversial role that was eventually reduced. In 1953, BAE's functions were delegated to two new agencies: the Agricultural Research Service and the Agricultural Marketing Service. Then, in 1961, agricultural economics research and analysis were again centralized in a single agency, the Economic Research Service. Through several later reorganizations and name changes, the agency has consistently upheld its early tradition of responding to the changing information needs of its clientele.

*ERS is a major contributor to each year's Agricultural Outlook Conference sponsored by USDA.*





*Tracking worldwide trade in agricultural commodities is one of the functions of the Agriculture and Trade Analysis Division.*

## **Organization and Structure: Getting the Job Done**

The ERS administrator, a career civil servant, reports to the assistant secretary of agriculture for economics. Other agencies reporting to this assistant secretary are the Economics Analysis Staff (EAS), the Economics Management Staff (EMS), the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), the Office of Energy (OE), and the World Agricultural Outlook Board (WAOB). WAOB serves as the USDA clearance center for supply, demand, and price projections and chairs the interagency commodity estimates committees. NASS collects data on agricultural production, farm prices, farm expenditures, and other related subjects. EMS provides administrative, personnel management, and editorial support for the USDA economics agencies.

ERS has four program divisions and a Data Services Center. But the ERS structure is flexible, permitting cross-division cooperation. These units are the vehicles for accomplishing the agency's four principal functions: research, situation and outlook, staff analysis, and data collection and management. Each division is organized into branches made up of sections. Division management includes a division director, an associate director, one or more deputy or assistant directors, branch chiefs, and section leaders. The Data Services Center is a staff office to the administrator.

The Agriculture and Rural Economy Division conducts research on the forces influencing the economic and sociodemographic structure of rural and agricultural America. Topics include rural population growth and migration, rural and agricultural labor markets, economic well-being of farm and rural people, changing conditions in agricultural credit and finance, performance of the Nation's macroeconomy and the farm economy, and links between agriculture and other industries.

The Agriculture and Trade Analysis Division studies the agricultural economies and policies of foreign countries and the agricultural trade and development relationships between foreign countries and the United States. The division relates economic, technical, and political factors to agricultural trade between countries. The structure, efficiency, and performance of foreign economies are major research interests of this division.



*Rural poverty is one of the socioeconomic topics of research in the Agriculture and Rural Economy Division.*



*The extent of irrigation in U.S. agriculture and its effects on both crop production and the environment are among the topics that researchers in the Resources and Technology Division study.*

**The Commodity Economics Division** analyzes the production, marketing, trade, and consumption of U.S. food and fiber products. The division is a primary source of commodity information, research, and analysis. In addition to domestic commodity work, division staff analyze international trade in commodities and monitor and perform basic research on food consumption.

*Supply of and demand for U.S. food and fiber products are studied in the Commodity Economics Division.*

**The Resources and Technology Division** analyzes agricultural resource and input issues involving soil, water, land, manufactured inputs, and technology at the regional and national levels. Topics include technological change in agriculture; supply, demand, and price relationships for agricultural resources and inputs; resource and input substitution and productivity; agricultural conservation and environmental programs; and domestic and international policy effects on agricultural and environmental resource use.

**The Data Services Center** employs state-of-the-art software and hardware technology to support automated data processing needs of the agency. The center develops and maintains the framework that supports and integrates all ADP systems. This framework provides each ERS member with access to all automated facilities, systems, and support services. Facilities include systems and software based on microcomputer, minicomputer, and mainframe processing.



*Duaine Denitto loads an IBM 3410 tape drive in the Data Services Center computer room. The tape drive is part of ERS's IBM 4361 mainframe computer facility. This facility is also tied into USDA's Washington Computer Center.*

## ERS Resources Are Lean, Efficient, Diverse

An increasingly efficient ERS does its job even as Federal budgets tighten. ERS operates on funds directly appropriated by Congress and funds received from other sources, including other government agencies, for specific analysis or information. The nominal budget figures show that appropriated funds have climbed from \$9.7 million in 1962 to about \$48 million in 1988. But, this 1988 level is actually about \$20 million less than in 1967, if you account for inflation. Full-time employee staff years, including EMS, dropped from 1,095 in 1962 to 831 in 1988.

The world's largest gathering of professional economists focusing on agriculture and rural issues works in ERS. A unique strength of ERS is its ability to integrate economics and other social sciences to provide the comprehensive information that decisionmakers need. The other disciplines of sociology, political science, geography, history, law, and other social sciences are essential to ERS. Secretaries, statistical assistants, and computer personnel help the research staff deliver accurate information in a fast and courteous manner. Computer systems analysts supply important software and technological assistance essential to data management and research efforts.

## Doing More With Less

|   | Million Dollars     | Staff Years* |
|---|---------------------|--------------|
| Agriculture and Rural Economy Division  | 10.4                | 159          |
| Agriculture and Trade Analysis Division | 7.7                 | 156          |
| Commodity Economics Division            | 9.5                 | 192          |
| Resources and Technology Division       | 7.1                 | 121          |
| Data Services Center                    | 3.7                 | 64           |
| Economics Management Staff              | 4.7                 | 110          |
| Office of the Administrator             | 1.7                 | 29           |
| Unallocated                             | 1.2                 | --           |
| Indirect costs                          | 1.7                 | --           |
| Total, 1988                             | 47.7                | 831          |
| Total, 1962                             | 51.6 (1988 dollars) | 1,095        |

\*One staff year equals one full-time employee working 1 full year.

## Who Works in ERS

|     |                                   |
|-----|-----------------------------------|
| 397 | Agricultural Economists           |
| 67  | Secretaries                       |
| 51  | Economists                        |
| 49  | Computer Specialists              |
| 41  | Statistical Assistants            |
| 29  | Clerk Typists                     |
| 14  | Economics Assistants              |
| 14  | Clerks                            |
| 8   | Sociologists                      |
| 8   | Administrative Assistants         |
| 7   | Historians                        |
| 5   | Social Science Analysts           |
| 5   | Computer Assistants               |
| 4   | Statisticians                     |
| 3   | Budget Assistants                 |
| 2   | Program Analysts                  |
| 2   | Geographers                       |
| 2   | Technical Information Specialists |
| 2   | Operations Research Analysts      |
| 1   | Attorney                          |
| 1   | Mathematician                     |

## ERS, Universities Cooperate To Enhance Agriculture's Future

ERS and the land-grant universities have a longstanding history of cooperation and professional exchange. Both, for example, contribute facilities, staff, and funds to projects of mutual interest. University employees may join ERS as visiting scholars, or ERS staff may take temporary university assignments.

ERS also cooperates with other Federal and State research and analysis organizations, including the Agricultural Research Service and the State agricultural experiment stations. These agencies can more effectively use their resources through complementary research as they plan and set priorities together.

ERS actively participates on the Joint Council on Food and Agricultural Sciences and the National Agricultural Research and Extension Users' Advisory Board, both of which help the Secretary of Agriculture develop policies, goals, strategies, and priorities for agricultural research, extension, and teaching. An active member in various regional land-grant research projects as well as in organizations such as the International Agriculture and Trade Research Consortium, ERS also opens up communication on agricultural and rural issues by sponsoring workshops and conferences.

## ERS Serves a Broad, Diverse Clientele

Policymakers at the Federal, State, and local levels, other Federal agencies, organizations in the private sector, and the university and research community are among ERS' clients. ERS supports the Secretary of Agriculture and the Executive Branch with analyses of many policy issues. Other staff analysis requests come from Congress, Department of the Interior, Office of the United States Trade Representative, Council of Economic Advisors, and Office of Management and Budget, as well as other agencies within and outside the Department of Agriculture.

The public expects lucid and factual explanations of policies and issues. ERS answers a steady stream of information requests from farmers, farm organization leaders, rural community officials, agribusiness firms, trade associations, food and nutrition organizations, church groups, students, teachers and college professors, and others.



*Sherman Robinson, professor of agricultural and resource economics at the University of California at Berkeley, spent the 1987/88 academic year in ERS' Agriculture and Rural Economy Division developing a computable general equilibrium model of the U.S. economy.*

*Stephen Hiemstra, center, a financial economist, and Steven Koenig, right, an agricultural economist, discuss the Agricultural Credit Act of 1987 that established the Federal Agricultural Mortgage Corporation ("Farmer Mac"), a secondary market for farm mortgages. Patrick O'Leary, of USDA's Economics Management Staff, conducts the interview for a USDA radio program.*

Agricultural policymakers constantly monitor the rapidly changing situation and outlook for U.S. and foreign agriculture. ERS is a major source of their information and analysis. Information produced from constant tracking of the domestic and international commodity and input markets provides information for producer decisionmaking and the orderly operation of agricultural commodity markets. Colleagues in universities and other research groups depend on ERS' broad socioeconomic research program forming the information base for situation and outlook analysis as well as longer term research.

Other publicly funded agencies are also ERS clients. The Soil Conservation Service, Farmers Home Administration, Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service, Food and Nutrition Service, Forest Service, Foreign Agricultural Service, Environmental Protection Agency, and Agency for International Development are among those who request research work from ERS.

## ERS Products Get the Word Out

**S**taff analyses, research monographs, journal articles, situation and outlook publications, the National Agricultural Outlook Conference, and data products are among the products tailoring ERS information to the needs of different people and groups. Examples of effective communication range from an analyst briefing one assistant secretary, to an ERS report directly reaching hundreds of people and thousands more indirectly through newspaper accounts, to a TV news feature reaching millions.

**Staff Analyses.** Requests for staff analyses usually relate either to a policy or program issue or to a problem--drought, famine, farm labor shortage--that requires action. Responses often are short briefing papers, sometimes prepared in a few hours or days.

Staff analysis results can be communicated through oral briefings for public officials or through less formal responses to questions from the press. Letters responding to congressional or public inquiries can include short staff analyses. ERS also prepares legislatively mandated reports which can be quite comprehensive and require considerable research and analysis.

Staff analyses can also be reported in brief publications featuring critical policy issues. These short publications have a broader audience than most staff work, since they are more widely circulated to decisionmakers.

No matter what form it takes, staff work must be responsive to the question asked, concise, thorough, well written, and sensitive to the context in which the question was asked. To ensure its accuracy and acceptability, staff work is

*ERS economist Walter Epps, center, discusses the food wholesaling industry with administrator John Lee, right, and Milton Erickson, agency coordinator for staff analysis.*





generally approved within divisions and by the administrator's office before release. Products from staff analysis constitute a small share of all ERS products, but they have high visibility, especially within USDA and the Congress.

**Monographs and Journal Articles.** Research monographs, journal articles, and papers delivered at professional meetings are often the vehicles for ERS research. The varied subject matter and the range from basic to applied research dictate that outlets vary considerably, each with a content and style targeted to specific audiences.

ERS research reports or monographs appear in several different departmental series ranging from popular presentation to the very technical: *Agriculture Information Bulletins*, *Rural Development Research Reports*, *Agricultural Economic Reports*, *Foreign Agricultural Economic Reports*, *Statistical Bulletins*,

and *Technical Bulletins*. Most report final results of research. ERS also publishes limited edition staff reports, conveying interim results to the research community.

All ERS research reports, including papers presented at conferences and meetings, are subject to peer review and supervisory clearance to assure the quality, consistency, and integrity of the research product. Publication in any agency series requires extensive peer review, often involving reviewers from both inside and outside the agency, as well as supervisory and editorial review.

ERS publishes its own journal, *The Journal of Agricultural Economics Research*. ERS researchers also regularly publish in a broad variety of outside professional journals, like the

*American Journal of Agricultural Economics*, *Rural Sociology*, the *Journal of Soil and Water Conservation*, the *Journal of Policy Modeling*, *Applied Economics*, the *Journal of Food Distribution Research*, *Meat Industry*, and many more.

ERS research results are visible in many other ways. They provide the underpinning for much of the other work of the agency and appear in both staff analysis and situation and outlook products. In addition, they are reported in popular form in virtually all of the agency's periodicals.

**Situation and Outlook Publications.** The monthly *Agricultural Outlook* (AO), ERS' premier situation and outlook publication, provides a mixture of outlook and indepth analysis of current commodity, trade, resource, and policy issues. AO and other situation and outlook reports are also disseminated electronically.

# United States Department of Agriculture



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Deputy Secretary

**Under Secretary  
International Affairs and  
Commodity Programs**

Agricultural Stabilization  
and Conservation Service

Foreign Agricultural Service

Office of International  
Cooperation and Development

Office of Budget and  
Program Analysis

Office of the  
General Counsel

**Assistant Secretary  
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Economic Analysis Staff

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**Economic Research Service**

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National Agricultural  
Statistics Service

World Agricultural  
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International Economic Systems  
National Economic Systems  
Operations

More than 65 situation and outlook reports supplement AO each year. These reports forecast events in domestic and international commodity and input markets as well as farm finance. Over half of the reports focus on specific commodities such as oil crops, cotton, tobacco, wheat, feed, and dairy. Other reports focus on resources, finance, exports, and world agricultural issues.

Situation and outlook reports may influence commodity prices and trading and business decisions, so they receive rigorous agency and departmental reviews and formal clearance by special situation and outlook boards.

Situation and outlook analysts also respond to numerous requests from the media and others, and their responses appear in general circulation newspapers, magazines, trade publications, and television and radio interviews.

ERS estimates a variety of indicators of the performance and well-being of the agriculture sector, which are published in the *Economic Indicators of the Farm Sector* series. Sold singly or by subscription, the five annual reports are *Farm Sector Review*, *Costs of Production*, *National Financial Summary*, *State Financial Summary*, and *Production and Efficiency Statistics*.

**Outlook Conferences.** The National Agricultural Outlook Conference and several regional outlook conferences held each year provide a forum for a wide range of government and industry leaders to discuss conditions and prospects for U.S. agriculture, international trade, and rural America. ERS analysts present a comprehensive picture of the situation and outlook for the major agricultural commodities and topical information for consumers and others involved in the food and fiber industry and rural development.

**Other Periodicals.** ERS also publishes several magazines for more general audiences:

*Farmline*, published monthly, presents ERS research and analysis in an easy to read form. It is aimed at the general public, serving them both directly and through widespread reprinting of its articles in the news media.

*Rural Development Perspectives (RDP)* reports rural development research done in ERS and elsewhere. Published three times a year, RDP communicates with people working on rural issues and is more popular in tone than a professional journal.

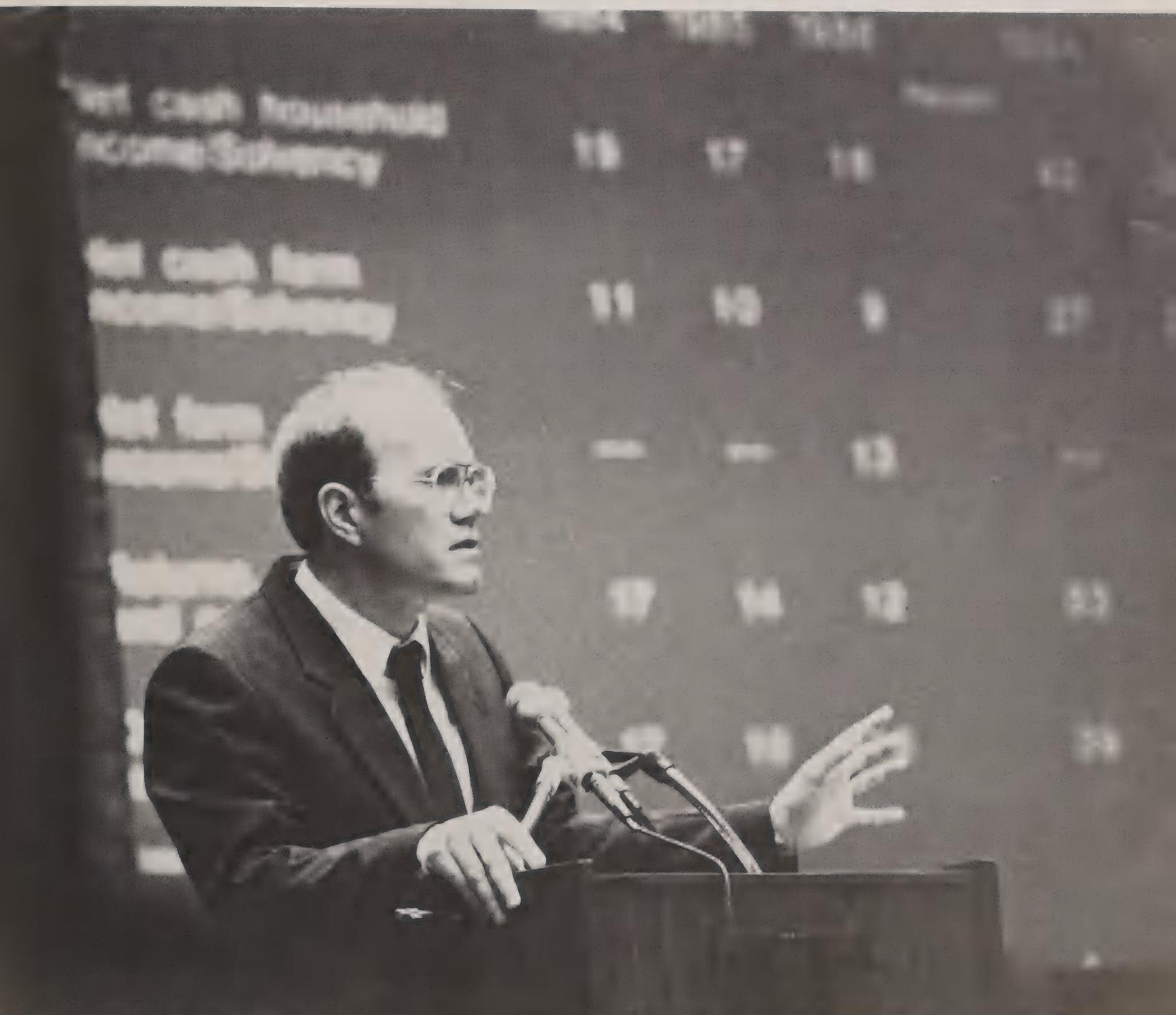
*National Food Review* addresses a food industry and consumer organization audience. Published quarterly, its broad coverage of food issues ranges from food prices, marketing techniques, and nutritional issues to government feeding programs.

#### **Databases and Other Products.**

Many ERS research programs create unique databases, a growing number of which are available to users outside the agency. These databases are developed in several forms, including electronic spreadsheets on diskettes and conventional data files on diskettes and tapes. These databases are offered for sale at nominal cost. The value added by ERS data collection, assembly, tabulation, and analysis make these databases an excellent bargain for other researchers. The ERS data products program also distributes databases from members of the American Agricultural Economics Association (AAEA) and the Rural Sociological Society (RSS) through a cooperative data sharing program.

Videotapes are a new ERS approach to disseminate information and analysis. ERS and the Extension Service recently developed a videotape on rural development issues. In addition, ERS produced a more popular videotape on rural communities, now available to television stations across the country.

*Gregory Hanson, a section leader in the Agriculture and Rural Economy Division, discusses the financial status of U.S. farmers at a recent National Agricultural Outlook Conference at USDA headquarters in Washington.*



## Doing the Job: Variety, Flexibility, and Responsiveness

The work of ERS researchers centers around the agency's four principal functions: research, situation and outlook analysis, staff analysis, and data management and collection. Research and data management and collection provide the knowledge base undergirding situation and outlook and staff analysis. The work of many staff members emphasizes either research or situation and outlook, but most find that their work can involve all four areas. The amount of staff work varies according to the current issues, the organizational unit to which the employee is assigned, and the employee's area of expertise. Some staff analysis requires considerable investment of time and staff resources, although most assignments are brief assessments of a specific topic or issue, lasting only a few days.

**Teamwork.** The opportunity to work with researchers from different disciplines and backgrounds gives ERS staff unique insights to a wide range of economic and social problems. ERS researchers and analysts often work closely with colleagues in other units of the agency or department, or with counterparts in universities and agricultural industries. The staff works on a wide range of problems affecting agriculture, rural America, and the global economy.

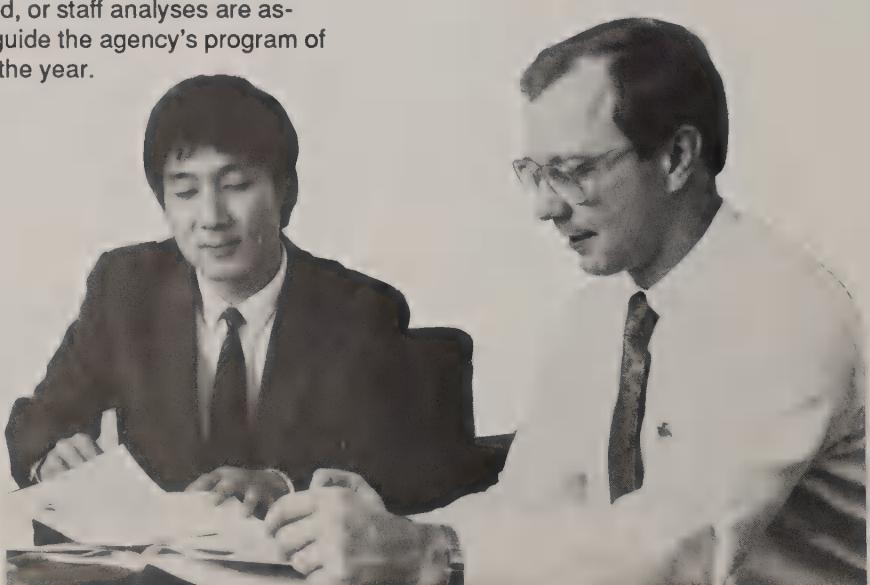
**Current Issues.** The ERS agenda is influenced by current issues and the

needs of its clientele, particularly those involved in national policies. ERS information products must be timely, policy-relevant, pertinent to user needs, and packaged in different forms appropriate for different clientele. ERS analysts enjoy a wide latitude of opportunities to be innovative in selecting specific topics and in developing and employing different techniques. Researchers are encouraged to help develop new ways of disseminating information and intelligence.

**Work Plans.** ERS managers collaborate with researchers and analysts to develop annual work plans. After reviewing legislative and executive mandates, public and private concerns, and expected budget, the ERS management team provides general guidelines, directions, and emphases for developing annual work plans. Researchers and analysts help translate those broad outlines into specific research and analysis objectives. Work plans are approved by division directors and the administrator's office. These plans, adjusted as issues emerge, studies are mandated, or staff analyses are assigned, guide the agency's program of work for the year.

**Professional Growth.** Training and special assignments are strong supports for professional growth in ERS. ERS secretaries and statistical assistants sharpen their skills and develop new ones that may lead to increased responsibilities. ERS researchers and analysts develop the capacity to anticipate topics and issues likely to be important, and to prepare for developing the databases, analytical skills, and information delivery systems needed to analyze them. ERS researchers and analysts contribute to the state of the art in methodology and theory in their disciplines, thereby enhancing knowledge within their professions. They hone their communication skills by publishing in a variety of outlets, and they participate in professional and industry meetings and conferences, briefings, and interagency taskforces. They frequently offer inhouse seminars and teach in local colleges and universities.

**Databases.** ERS researchers have access to a rich and varied storehouse of data. Databases available for ERS re-



*Xiaoqing Dai, a policy analyst from the People's Republic of China, discusses the effects of the Food Security Act of 1985 on world trade with Harry Baumes, a branch chief in the Agriculture and Trade Analysis Division.*

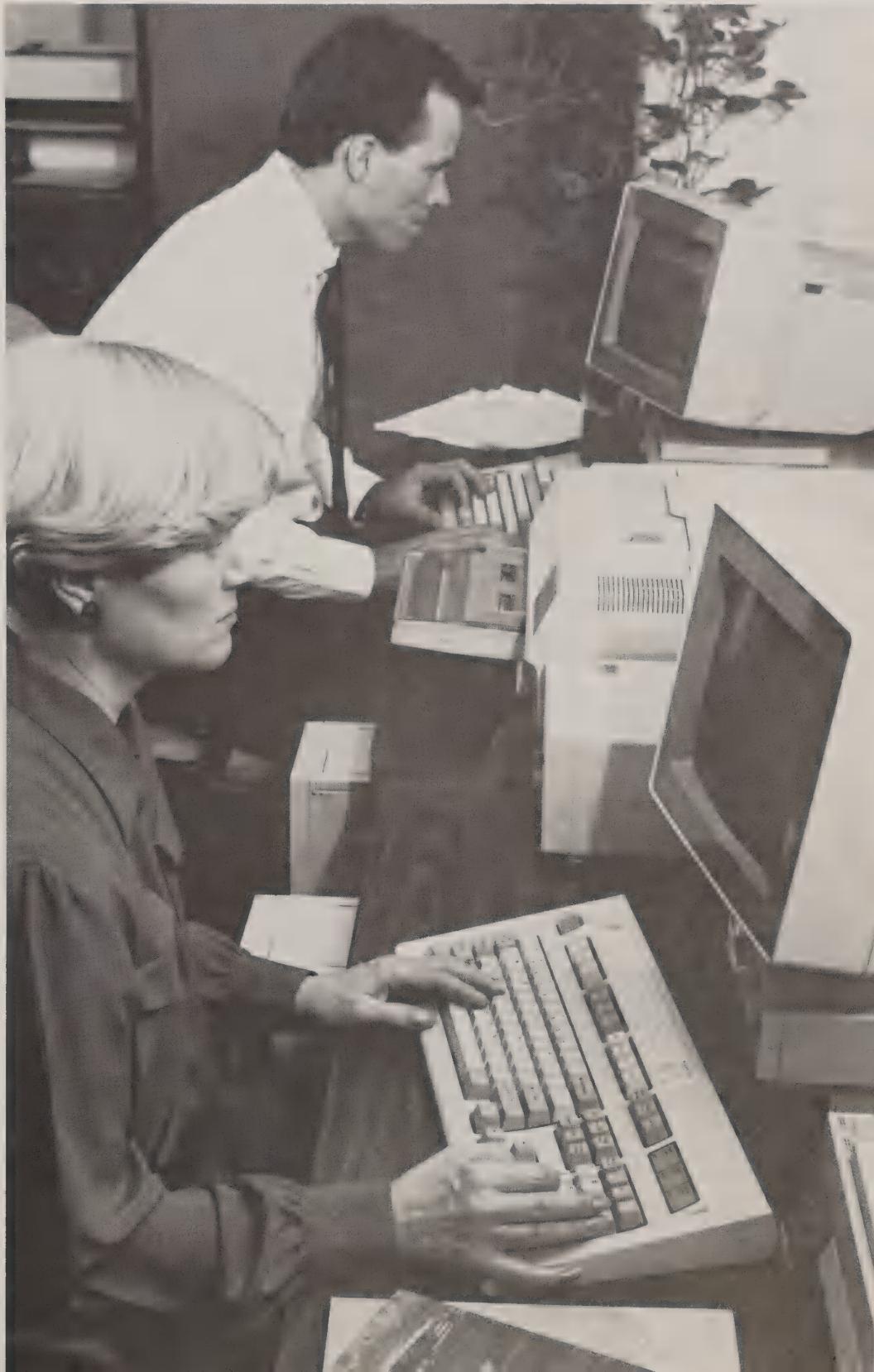
*Agricultural economists Diane Bertelsen and Mitchell Morehart analyze farm income data on new IBM Personal System 2 model 60 and model 80 equipment.*

search, situation and outlook, and staff analysis include:

- A wide range of published and computer micro data files obtained from other government agencies. The Bureau of the Census supplies access to data from the Census of Agriculture and the Census of Housing and Population. The Bureau of Economic Analysis compiles annual county-level income and employment estimates by industrial sector. The National Agricultural Statistics Service furnishes a wide range of agricultural estimates and statistics.
- International data collected by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the International Monetary Fund.
- Data collected and compiled by ERS staff, sometimes in cooperation with the National Agricultural Statistics Service. An example is the *Economic Indicators of the Farm Sector*.

Selected ERS data are placed in an agency repository, the Automated Research Information for Economic Studies (ARIES), for easy access and use. ERS researchers also have access to a number of different statistical models developed either internally or cooperatively with university researchers and, in some cases, to models obtained from the private sector.

ERS equips its researchers with the technological knowledge and skills to use the agency's full range of automated equipment and information systems. When such systems are completely operational, every employee will be able to communicate with a central





*Economist Charlene Price discusses food marketing trends with her section leader, Charles Handy.*

system of hardware and software linking all agency units.

**Travel.** Job assignments often involve travel, sometimes to foreign nations. Employees may travel to collect information, to speak to a group working in their subject area, or to participate in professional meetings or training activities. Travel depends on the agency's priorities and budget.

**Varied Assignments.** All ERS employees are permanently assigned to the Washington headquarters. But some short-term assignments away from headquarters are possible. Employees may serve in field assignments for up to 3 years, generally through cooperative agreements with U.S. universities. An exchange program between the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics (ABARE) and ERS furnishes exciting short-term assignments. Since 1980, ERS and ABARE researchers have regularly participated in this exchange, each spending about a year working in the counterpart agency.

Shorter assignments, usually only a few weeks or months, enable ERS to provide assistance to foreign or domestic organizations. For example, projects sponsored by the U.S. Agency for International Development may use ERS staff through reimbursable agreements. ERS researchers also serve short assignments with organizations like Resources for the Future. Some receive legislative training by working with members of Congress or congressional committees.

### **Working in the Civil Service: Responsibilities and Benefits**

ERS people are members of the Federal civilian work force, known as the civil service. Civil service means fulfilling certain responsibilities and adhering to a formal code of acceptable conduct, as well as enjoying many privileges, benefits, and opportunities for professional development.

Because of the sensitivity of some ERS information, limits on commodity futures trading and outside business dealings are imposed on ERS employees to avoid conflict of interest. There are restrictions on what one may accept from individuals and outside organizations and what may be done with or on government property. These restrictions help avoid misconduct. Political activity is also restricted. The USDA *Employee Responsibilities and Conduct Handbook* details the restrictions.

**Pay.** ERS employees are paid under one of three plans: the General Schedule (GS), General Merit (GM), and Senior Executive Service (SES). Education and experience determine the grade at which one enters the job. Employees in grades 1 to 12 are under the GS plan. Within-grade raises, about a 3-percent increase in salary, are given each year for satisfactory performance for the first 3 years of employment, every 2 years for the next 6

years, and every 3 years for the next 9 years. GS employees may also qualify for performance bonuses based on their annual performance ratings. Within-grade raises of the GM employees depend upon their performance ratings and salary levels and, like GS employees, they also may qualify for performance bonuses. SES promotions and pay increases are largely determined by performance.

**Promotions.** Competitive and career ladder are the types of promotions within the Federal system. Competitive promotions are based on competition with other qualified people who are eligible for the promotion based on job-related factors. Other promotions are career ladder promotions which are based on performance, other qualifying factors, and the promotion potential specified for the position. All promotions must meet the basic government qualification standards. Most promotions through GM-13 for employees in professional job series are career ladder, while those for GM-14 and above are competitive.

**Recruitment.** Most recruiting for agricultural economists through the GM-13 level is done through an open continuous vacancy announcement. Applicants for agricultural economist jobs in the agency may apply for this announcement by submitting a Standard Form 171 (SF-171) application for Federal employment, along with transcripts and other required documents. Applicants for other positions may respond to individually advertised position announcements. Applications are evaluated and selections made following official personnel procedures.

To acquire a blank SF-171, to apply for the standing register for agricultural economists, and to receive current vacancy announcements, write to

USDA/EMS/PD/REAP Branch  
Examining Unit  
Room 1447 South Building  
14th Street and Independence Ave., SW  
Washington, DC 20250  
or call (202) 447-7638.

ERS is strongly committed to equal employment opportunity for all persons, without regard to race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, or handicap. This policy applies to all aspects of employment: hiring, promotion, training, awards, and any career opportunities. ERS also takes affirmative action steps to assure that women and minorities are proportionately represented in all its job series and at all grade levels. Affirmative action goals are set each year according to the current needs. Appropriate recruiting efforts are made based on those goals.

ERS' policy is to foster a climate where all employees feel welcome and able to advance to the full limits of their potential. Supervisors are trained and held accountable in their performance evaluation for carrying out this policy.

#### **Performance Evaluations.**

Employees and supervisors establish clear, reasonable, and achievable performance standards and elements at the beginning of each rating period. Supervisors must provide accurate and timely feedback to the employee on performance during the year and then evaluate employees against those standards at year's end. Performance evaluations are reviewed at the next

level of supervision for consistency. Nonsupervisory employees are eligible to receive increases every 1 to 3 years if their performance is satisfactory, until they reach the top of their pay scale.

**Work Hours.** ERS has flexitime, a schedule of flexible hours. Employees and their supervisors agree upon a starting time between 7 and 9 a.m. The employees' leaving time is 8 1/2 hours later, with 30 minutes for lunch. Employees may also ask to alter their work hours for a period as short as 1 day. Flexible work hours enable employees to accommodate carpools, child care, school hours, and spouses' work schedules.

**Leave.** Employees earn 4, 6, or 8 hours' annual leave per 2-week pay period, depending on years of service. Sick leave accrues at 4 hours per pay period.

**Training.** ERS employees participate in many training programs and the agency pays tuition for employees to take job-related courses at colleges and universities. The agency sometimes sponsors an employee for full-time training at a college or university.

**Awards.** The agency's awards program encourages quality of all kinds of work, from typing manuscripts, to responding to phone inquiries, to developing econometric models. Intangible awards--the respect of colleagues or the appreciation of a supervisor, for example--can give much satisfaction. But, the agency also gives monetary and honorary awards for excellent work.

**Incentive Awards:** The monetary or incentive awards come in various forms. All employees are eligible for monetary awards ranging from \$200 to several thousand dollars for superior achievement on a special project or activity or for employee suggestions. Employees may also receive bonuses recognizing their excellent performance during the year. The amount of the bonus is determined primarily by the employee's performance rating. Other factors are the amount of money in the award pool and the number of employees eligible for bonuses.

Managers and supervisors are also eligible for merit pay increases at the end of each year for fully satisfactory performance.

**Excellence Awards:** Up to four monetary and honorary Excellence Awards are given to ERS staff each year for exceptional products. These products fit in three categories: research, staff analysis, and situation and outlook reports. Committees composed of ERS staff, and an outside representative in the case of the research award, review the nominations and recommend the products to receive the awards. The administrator and staff make the final decisions. Recipients of these awards receive a substantial monetary reward.

**Administrator's Awards:** The honorary Administrator's Awards provide special recognition, are given at an annual ceremony, and serve as a link with the departmental Honor Awards Program. Awardees are selected by the agency management team, indicating agencywide recognition of superior work. These awards often follow a financial award.

**Honor Awards:** The departmental Honor Awards, providing the highest recognition possible in the U.S. Department of Agriculture, are given for extraordinary service to the department as judged by a group of reviewers from both in and outside the department. Superior Service Awards are given for excellence over a period of several years. Distinguished Service Awards are given either for a long period of high achievement or the most exceptional kind of achievement.

**Presidential Awards:** Presidential Rank Awards are the highest awards given for U.S. Government service. Given only to members of the Senior Executive Service, they carry with them \$10,000 and \$20,000 bonuses. The President of the United States presents the \$20,000 awards.

**Retirement plans.** Civil service employees are covered under two retirement plans. Federal employees hired after December 31, 1983, are covered under the Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS). Employees hired before that date are generally covered by the Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS), unless they switched to the new FERS system.

FERS has three components: Social Security benefits, the Basic Benefit Plan, and the Thrift Savings Plan. Social Security provides monthly benefits for retirees 62 and older, for disability, for eligible survivors, and a lump sum benefit at death. To receive Social Security benefits, a worker must work a minimum period. Social Security taxes are paid by the employee and matched by the government. They cover both Social Security benefits and Medicare.

The Basic Benefit Plan provides monthly benefits for retirees and their survivors and disability benefits, both in addition to those provided by Social Security. Total employee contributions for Social Security, Medicare, and the Basic Benefit plan will not exceed 8.45 percent of pay under the current law. The amount paid for the Basic Benefit plan is the difference between the Social Security contribution and 7 percent.

CSRS employees have a single-component retirement system from which they will receive monthly retirement benefits, disability insurance, and survivors' benefits. They contribute to and are eligible for Medicare. However, CSRS employees do not pay Social Security taxes and are not covered by Social Security.

The Thrift Savings Plan is a special tax-deferred savings plan for Federal employees. FERS employees may contribute up to 10 percent of their pay to the plan. The government will automatically contribute 1 percent for each FERS employee, whether the employee contributes or not. In addition, the government will contribute up to a total of 5 percent, depending on what the employee contributes. CSRS employees may participate in the tax-deferred Thrift Savings Plan, but the government makes no contribution for them.



*Secretary of Agriculture Richard Lyng presents a Unit Award for Superior Service to ERS' Carol Goodloe, Barbara Chattin, and Mary Anne Normile, left to right. The award cited their work in providing economic information and analysis to the team that negotiated the agricultural provisions of the U.S.-Canada trade agreement.*



*Mitzi Barker manages the Agriculture Federal Credit Union branch in the ERS headquarters building. The credit union offers complete banking services at the branch.*

## **Facilities and Services: Attractive and Accessible**

**E**RS occupies a relatively new leased office building at 1301 New York Avenue, NW, in downtown Washington. The sole occupant of the building, ERS has access to about 200,000 square feet of space, of which approximately 150,000 square feet is office space. The facilities and physical arrangement of the building typically allow semi-private offices for nonsupervisory research and analysis staff and private office space for supervisors and managers.

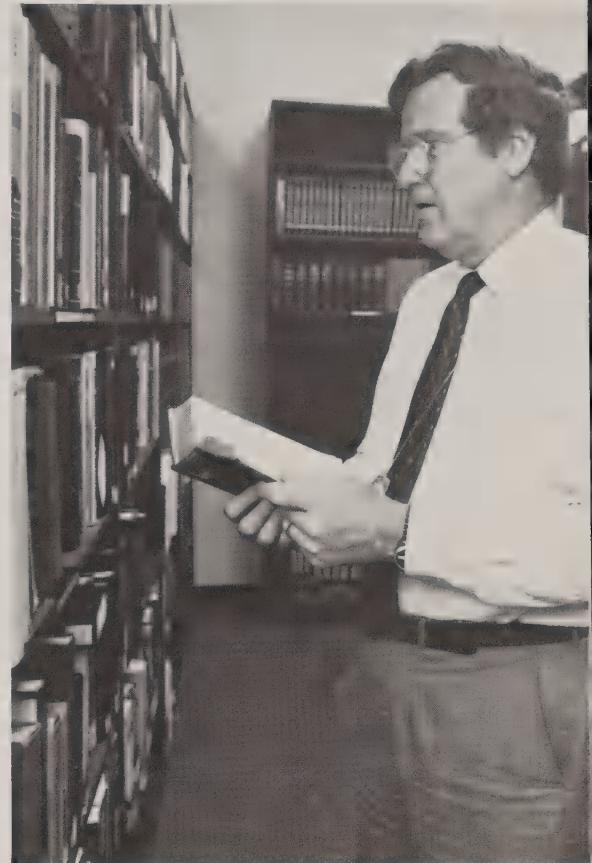
Smoking is not permitted in most of the building, although smoking is allowed in designated areas on each floor.

The New York Avenue facility, within three blocks of the White House, is within easy commuting distance of the main USDA complex and the U.S. Capitol. A shuttle service operates hourly to the main USDA complex for ERS people on official business.

The New York Avenue office is conveniently located near major traffic arteries into the city and the Metro bus and rail system. Stations for all of the major subway lines are short walks away. Parking is available inside the building on a daily or monthly basis, and about 50 ERS parking spaces are designated for approved carpools at special monthly rates.

The ERS building contains a range of other services. Security guards control access to the building on each workday and selected times during the weekend and most holidays. The facility also contains banking services through the Agriculture Federal Credit Union, a health unit staffed with a full-time nurse, a physical fitness center, and a concession area equipped with soft drink and fast-food machines, a microwave oven, and small dining area. Other services, including cafeterias, barbershop, and cardshop, are available to all USDA employees in the main Independence Avenue complex.

Library facilities are available through the ERS Reference Center, libraries in the main Independence Avenue complex, and the National Agricultural Library in nearby Beltsville, Maryland. The ERS Reference Center is a small library located within the New York Avenue building. It contains a collection of journals and periodicals in fields related to the agency's work as well as small collections of both reference and circulating books. The Reference Center also provides ERS staff with access to other collections through its inter-library loan services and agreements with other libraries. Reference Center staff provide bibliographic searches on a limited basis as well as other reference assistance services. The Reference Center also archives ERS publications. The National Agricultural Library contains an extensive collection of books and journals as well as the other facilities and services of a large library. A shuttle bus from the main Independence Avenue buildings serves the library.



*David Harrington, deputy director for agriculture of the Agriculture and Rural Economy Division, uses the Reference Center in ERS headquarters.*

## Living in the National Capital Area

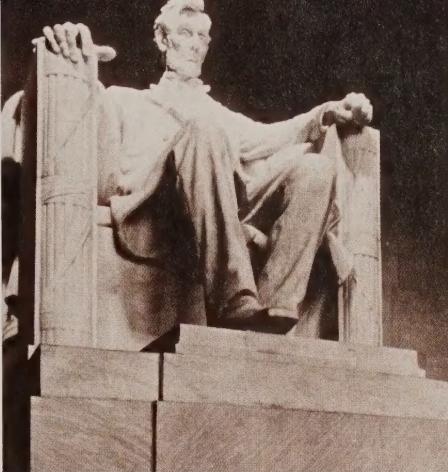
ERS employees and their families enjoy many amenities and advantages of the Nation's capital. Washington is the national center of government and the site of the U.S. Capitol, but its economic base also includes an expanding private sector. Three airports, National, Dulles, and Baltimore-Washington, give ready domestic and international access to the national capital area.

The Greater Washington Metropolitan Area, encompassing parts of Maryland and Northern Virginia as well as the District of Columbia, provides a diverse, exciting cosmopolitan setting with enormous social, cultural, and professional opportunities. Its numerous points of historical interest, its many museums, theaters, and art galleries, and its professional sports teams make Washington a leading cultural and entertainment center.

Educational opportunities for ERS employees and their families are rich and varied. They include a choice of public and private institutions for elementary and secondary education and many institutions of higher education, including major universities, smaller colleges, community colleges, and the USDA Graduate School. The USDA Graduate School offers educational opportunities for Federal employees through its evening programs, special programs, independent study programs, and international programs. Some ERS employees draw on the educational opportunities for professional growth and development, while others use the local



*Metro rail and Metrobus services link most parts of the metro Washington area. This photo, taken on the Virginia shore of the Potomac River, shows the domed Jefferson Memorial and the Washington Monument in the background. (Photo courtesy of the Washington Convention and Visitors Association.)*



*Daniel Chester French's tribute to Abraham Lincoln is but one of many memorials to America's leaders. (Photo courtesy of the Washington Convention and Visitors Association.)*

universities and colleges as a way to teach or interact with faculty members from their disciplines.

The geographic diversity offers the choice of many different lifestyles. Housing choices range from apartments or condominiums to townhouses or single-family dwellings with locations ranging from the heart of Washington to the Maryland and Virginia suburbs. Housing costs generally decline as one moves away from the center of the city. Washington metro area living costs are about 7 percent higher than the U.S. average.

Public bus and rail systems serve suburbs of Maryland, Virginia, and District of Columbia. Four lines--red, blue, orange, and yellow--of the still-expanding Metro rail system bring commuters into the city from stations as far away as 20 miles. About 250 ERS carpooling employees use special-rate parking in the New York Avenue headquarters.



*The sprawling University of Maryland, about 10 miles from downtown Washington in suburban College Park, offers doctoral programs in both agricultural economics and economics. It is one of many colleges and universities in the metro Washington area.*



*Spacious homes in the nearby suburbs offer one housing option for ERS employees.*





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This document was prepared by a special ERS  
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